

074983 - San Luis Rey River Flood Control

Contributed by Edward Louie
Thursday, 12 January 2006

News Update!

There is a heightened threat of potential flooding of the San Luis Rey River due to unchecked growth of vegetation in the channel. Our focus is on minimizing that risk.

In advance of a major, phased clearing effort planned for early 2006, the Corps began removing the invasive *Arundo donax* plant from about 30 acres in the river channel.

The Corps, in coordination with the City of Oceanside, also developed an emergency action plan detailing actions to be taken in the event of actual or forecasted flood events that includes: monitoring of National Weather Service rainfall and runoff forecasts; emergency removal of debris collecting at the piers of bridges crossing the river; and emergency clearing of vegetation in the channel consistent with the proposed phased clearing plan.

- 1) If the National Weather Service 3-day rainfall forecast equals or exceeds 6 inches (10,000 cfs), we will clear debris from the river immediately upstream of the four bridges (College, Foussat, Douglas and Benet).
- 2) If the rainfall forecast equals or exceeds 9 inches (25,000 cfs), we will clear vegetation along a continuous 5-mile stretch in the channel, ranging in widths from 60-100 feet. This effort will be consistent with the alignment negotiated with the resource agencies to minimize impacts to the environment.
- 3) The Corps has identified a contractor who will provide people, equipment and materials to undertake a flood fight, if necessary. We are working to identify rock sources and equipment staging areas

The emergency action plan was designed to protect lives and property from potential flooding during this rainy season.

Executive Summary:

Although physical construction has been completed, the project isn't finally finished until there is an Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Plan which is needed to ensure the channel is maintained properly and the project continues to do what it is intended to do—offer flood protection to area residents. The O&M plan isn't finished because the Corps is still working on a river maintenance study required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). This agency has listed the entire flood control project area as designated critical habitat for the Least Bell's Vireo, a federally listed endangered species. Part of the Corps' study requires completion of a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act. After the Corps meets all these requirements and completes the various studies, we will produce a final O&M plan for the channel. At that point, we will also turn over the entire project to the City of Oceanside. The city will then ask the Federal Emergency Management Agency to adjust the floodplain boundaries so flood insurance requirements can be relaxed. All this is expected to be finished by the end of 2006.

Strategic Message:

Priorities for the Army Corps of Engineers on the San Luis Rey River flood control project are the protection of lives and property and the preservation and restoration of the environment. Inevitably, these priorities will sometimes conflict. Legal requirements, jurisdictional issues and other challenges have delayed completion of this project for several years. The Corps regrets the inconvenience these delays have caused, and we are doing all we can to see that this needed project is finished as soon as practically possible. We have never wavered in our commitment to protect those affected by the flood control project. We understand the frustration among some of our stakeholders who have waited patiently for the completion of the project, only to discover—as we ourselves have—that still more legal requirements needed to be met. We are confident, however, that by the end of year, 2006, final readjustment of the floodplain boundaries will be finished. We appreciate your past patience and continued understanding.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: Why has this project taken so long?

The study — a post authorization decision document must include the technical documentation to support the recommended changes in the Operations and Maintenance Report. This takes time as it includes surveys of endangered species and current vegetation conditions. Endangered species surveys must be done during spring and summer. New information has required an analysis of alternatives. These alternatives have undergone revisions.

Q: You cite permit issuance problems and the need for environmental studies as explanations for the postponements. Why so many requirements?

Federal laws and regulations that must be complied with require surveys and analysis of the impacts an alternative will have on the environment, in particular endangered species in the project area.

Q: What is the Corps' role in the flood insurance issue?

The Army Corps of Engineers is mandated by Congress to provide flood protection. We are the flood control agency for civil works. We are not involved with flood insurance premiums or setting requirements. The Corps must insure the San Luis Rey project provides a minimum 100-year level of flood protection for the completed project. Once we have completed the project we will turn it over to the city of Oceanside, and information related to new flood plain boundaries will be sent to FEMA. The City of Oceanside, through an application process, will ask FEMA to redefine flood plain boundaries.

Q: Many residents think that the Oceanside area has been in a drought for a longtime. Why is a flood control project even needed?

Flood control is required for several reasons:

- 1) We cannot yet predict the weather. Patterns have been identified such as La Nina or El Nino, but this is relatively new.
- 2) Oceanside is a growing community. An increase in development means more hard surfaces that do not absorb precipitation and runoff. More and more runoff flows into channels and to the ocean. The local area of Oceanside and southern California in general can have a great fluctuation of winter weather patterns as we have seen with El Nino of 96/97 and the last several years with below average precipitation. As part of the national economic development, flood control is of vital importance. A case in point is the recent flooding in parts of Europe. Damages both public and personal can cost 100's of millions of dollars.

Q: Since this project started, the basin has become overrun with vegetation. Why doesn't the Corps clean it out?

Due to the vegetation and increased presence of endangered species, consultation with USFWS demands vegetation surveys and other types of surveys. Federal law requires thorough documentation and analysis of impacts. As a result, vegetation removal cannot be done until a plan has been agreed upon.

Q: What's the status of the endangered species in the flood control basin? Which ones are in there now?

There are currently 7 endangered species within or near the project area. These include the least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, western snowy plover, coastal California gnatcatcher, arroyo southwestern toad, California least tern and the tide water goby. The least Bell's vireo and the southwestern willow flycatcher are the two species identified as existing inside the project area. The others may exist around the project area.

Q: What's a realistic timetable or deadline for residents to expect their annual flood insurance requirements to end?

The current schedule, subject to final Section 7 Consultation with the USF&W Services and funding by Congress, to complete the study is late-summer 2005, with implementation and clearing the channel of vegetation in the fall of 2006.

Initiate negotiate with USF&WS OCT 02

Obtain Biological Opinion from USF&WS APRIL 05

Corps to complete SEIS/EIR, Obtain Permits, Finalize O&M Plan SEPT 05

Channel Clearing of Summer/Fall of 2006

Corps certification of Flood Plain Boundaries (FPB's) (100-year) to FEMA SEPT 06

City of Oceanside submits FPB changes request OCT 06

FEMA revises FPB's DEC 06

Q: Who or what agency can best help them do that? How do they contact them?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency can assist. You can visit their website at www.fema.gov, or you may may e-mail a Map Specialist or talk to one at 1-877-FEMA MAP.

Endangered species identified in and or around the project area.

The links to the those species are:

Coastal California Gnatcatcher - <http://endangered.fws.gov/i/b6w.html>

Willow Flycatcher - <http://www.usgs.nau.edu/swwf/>

Western Snowy Plover - <http://biology.usgs.gov/s+t/SNT/noframe/ca168.htm>

Arroyo Southwestern Toad - http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/studios/brc/report/20_arroyo.html

Least Bells Vireo - <http://www.santamargaritariver.org/species/vireo.html>

California Least Tern -
<http://biology.usgs.gov/s+t/SNT/noframe/ca168.htm>

Tidewater Goby - <http://endangered.fws.gov/r/fr94527.html>

Related Links

County to propose plan for park along San Luis Rey

By Luis Monteagudo Jr., UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER
Thursday, January 16, 2003

The San Luis Rey River is where county supervisors want to build a regional park, but it could take years to finance and complete the project.

The Board of Supervisors voted unanimously yesterday to have county staff draft a detailed park proposal, a first step in the planning process.

http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/northcounty/20030116-9999_1mc16river.html

San Diego Wetlands - San Luis Rey
http://www.seaworld.org/swc/wetlands/sd_county_wetlands/san_luis_rey.htm

San Luis Watershed
http://www.projectcleanwater.org/html/ws_san_luis_rey.html

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